NRC AND ITS IMPACT ON INDO- BANGLADESH
RELATIONS
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The NATIONAL REGISTER OF CITIZENS (NRC) is a register that enumerates the names of real citizens of India residing in the state of Assam and that they have proved it through certain legal procedure. Assam carried out the first NRC in the year 1951; based on the first census of Independent India and updation of the NRC List was an aim behind the present exercise. India too conducted its first census in 1951. Assam started updating the register in 2015 and completed in 2019.

Key Words: National Register of Citizens (NRC), Assam, Citizens, Illegal migrants, Census

The Citizenship Act of 2003 laid the responsibility on the Central Government to update and maintain the National Register of Citizens in Assam. The aim behind it was to identify the illegal migrants who have entered India through the borders of Assam from Bangladesh and have spread to many parts of India, particularly the states like Assam and West Bengal. Their majority live in these two states and many of them are working in Delhi. The aim does not end till their identification, detention but their deportation as well. It was the order of the highest court of India i.e. the Supreme Court to start the process of updating the NRC in 2013 that made its implementation the ground possible.
The total population of Assam constitutes around 3.29 crore and they all had to prove their Indian Citizenship. Such exercise was done because there have always been claims that huge illegal migration is taking place from Bangladesh. By carrying the exercise of NRC, they could not only identify foreign nationals but also restrict the further inflow of migrants as this problem, in future, would pose a lot of pressure on Indian resources as it is already putting now. The indigenous population is not able to get the employment opportunities in Assam because foreigners have taken the jobs mainly in the informal sector.

There are many causes behind the huge influx of infiltrators in Assam. One of them is the porous borders. India and Bangladesh have porous borders because of which it becomes very easy for the infiltrators to enter the boundaries of India. The other reasons are historical, cultural and linguistic ties that both the countries share with each other. The original name of Bangladesh was East Bengal, which was part of India itself but due to the divide and rule policy of Britishers; led to the partition of India on 15th August.

Lord Curzon divided the Indian state of Bengal into East Bengal and West Bengal in 1905 on communal lines. The inhabitants of Bengal were happily living together but forceful policy of the British Government that separated them. Culturally also, the people of West Bengal and Bangladesh have similarities called as TRANSNATIONAL CUTURE.

Assamese were required to submit certain documents for their inclusion in the NRC List. The names of these documents are mentioned in the list given below-

NATIONAL REGISTER OF CITIZENS (NRC) IN ASSAM
The people who will make up the list or in other words, included in the NRC, will enjoy all the rights enshrined in the Constitution of India and its safeguards. As such, the Government will consider these people as Indian Citizens; and nobody can harass them in any way. They will also get the advantages of the schemes introduced by the Government.

According to the Government, the people whose names are not enshrined in the NRC List will not make them foreigners. Such people will get the opportunity to take their case to the Foreigners’ Tribunal and appear before them.

If a person loses his or her case in the Tribunal, the one can then move the High Court and then, the Supreme Court. The State Government has made it clear in Assam that it will not detain any person until the Foreigners’ Tribunal declares him or her as a foreigner.

ASSAM ACCORD

The Assam Accord was signed on 14th August 1985. According to the Accord, the migrants who have entered the Indian State of Assam before 25th March 1971 shall be regarded as citizens and the people who came in the state on or after 25 March 1971 shall be regarded as
the illegal migrants. It was due to the major issue of huge influx of illegal migrants, mainly from Bangladesh, that the people of Assam came together to protest, demonstrate and put pressure on the Government of India to identify, disenfranchise and deport them.

The demand to distinguish between foreigners and Indian citizens became strong in 1979. Therefore, the movement started under the leadership of two student unions like All Assam Student Union (AASU) and All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP). These two groups were very serious to deal with the issue of illegal infiltrators. They sent a memorandum to the then Central Government under the leadership of Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, who were in continuous engagement from the year 1980-1984 with these two student groups.

On 31st October 1984, Indira Gandhi died and then Rajiv Gandhi came to power in 1984. During the tenure of Rajiv Gandhi, the Assam Accord was signed to provide a solution to the long-standing problem to the illegal migration in the Indian state of Assam, especially from Bangladesh.

**PROCESS OF NRC IN ASSAM**

In Assam, the NRC officially started in 2015, under the monitoring of the Supreme Court of India. The total applicants who had applied for the NRC were 3.29 crore people and out of which 3.11 crore people were selected to the final list.
The people who were left out of the NRC List can take their appeal to the Foreigners’ Tribunal. The right to declare a person as foreigner vests with the Foreigners’ Tribunal and this right is enjoyed by it in accordance with the provisions laid down in the Foreigners’ Act 1946 and Foreigners’ Tribunal Order 1964.
The people who were not satisfied with the decision taken at Foreigners’ Tribunal, they can take their appeals to the higher authorities like Guwahati High Court and the Supreme Court of India. Those who were not able to prove their Indian Citizenship and identified as illegal migrants by the Foreigners’ Tribunal; they were put into detention camps before their deportation to their own country.

NRC’S IMPACT ON INDO-BANGLADESH RELATIONS

Bangladesh as an independent in the world structure got its recognition from India. Bangladesh as a country was born in December 1971 and India shares diplomatic relations with Bangladesh right from its Independence. There are historical, cultural, linguistic relations with each other and both the countries have democracy as their political system, Secularism and there are other common factors between the two nations besides these two. Both the nations respect each other’s sovereignty and the principle of equality.
In October 2019, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh made a visit to India and met her Indian Counterpart, Narendra Modi. During the meeting, she expressed her concerns over the issue of NRC. Apart from this, in the month of July, the government of Bangladesh kept forward their concerns over the whole procedure of NRC. India has assured Bangladesh that NRC is an internal matter and the people who have not proved their Indian Citizenship; will not be sent to Bangladesh.

Bangladesh is mainly worried about the influx of large number of migrants who will be deported after the completion of the process of NRC. This is mainly troubling Bangladesh because it is already grappling with the problem of Rohingya refugees and particularly when there is the least chance of them being repatriated. It is currently providing asylum to nine lakh Rohingya refugees.

The impact of the arrival of Rohingya Muslims is clearly visible through levels of poverty and pressure on infrastructure. Since Bangladesh considers Rohingya refugees as not their own people, there have been fights between the countries who are giving them shelter and the refugees, which can increase in the coming times. Therefore, Bangladesh has apprehension that it may face the similar kind of situation when the people will be excluded from the NRC List.

**CONCLUDING REMARKS**

India needs to consider the issue of NRC very carefully otherwise the bilateral relations built between India and Bangladesh might suffer. It has taken years to build economic and strategic goodwill between both the countries.

It is unfortunate when it seems that Bangladesh has no wish to solve the problem of illegal migrants to the satisfaction of both the countries. The previous Governments in Bangladesh, in the past, have denied the very existence of this problem.

The issue of illegal migration between India and Bangladesh should not be ignored for a long time, especially when bilateral relations between both the countries are on a good footing. India is under the pressure both at the domestic as well as International level when it comes to deciding the future of 1.9 million people who have been excluded from the NRC List.
If both the countries want to have sustainable cordial bilateral relations, then it is expected on both sides that they should contribute their best while dealing with any issue and now, particularly, the issue of illegal migration. Both the countries need to be sensitive about each other’s issues and the issue of illegal migration is one such issue.

**ENDNOTES:**

1. *The documents like the electoral rolls of Assam till midnight 24th March 1971 and the National Register of Citizens 1951, both together are called as Legacy Data.*

2. *The Illegal Migration determination by Tribunal Act, also called the IMDT Act of 1983 was enacted to determine the foreigners in Assam. This Act was applicable in Assam only.*

3. *According to the Foreigners’ Act of 1946, which is applied in the rest of India States, the last date to decide the Indian Citizenship of illegal migrants is 19th July 1948.*

**REFERENCES:**


